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THE GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER.

BY MRS. MARY TREAT.

LAST spring a pair of noisy great crested flycatchers abandoned their usual nesting place in the woods, and resolved to take up their abode among civilized birds.

It is only a few years since the wood pewee was first observed to leave the dark woods and nest around our dwellings. This little bird builds a neat compact nest which it glues fast to the limb of a tree, and lines it with some soft material. In Southern New Jersey it often uses the silky down of the cotton grass (*Eriophorum virginicum*) for a lining. It covers its nest externally with lichens, very much after the fashion of the hummingbird. This charming little flycatcher is now one of our most confiding, familiar birds. It will be interesting to learn if the great crested flycatcher has also concluded to become civilized, or is it simply a freak of one pair of birds?

Audubon says of this species, "The places chosen by the great crested flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus* Linn.) for its nest are so familiar, and the composition of its fabric is so very different from that of all others of the genus with which I am acquainted, that perhaps no one, on seeing it for the first time, would imagine it to belong to a flycatcher. There is nothing of the elegance of some or the curious texture of others displayed in it. Unlike its kinsfolk, it is contented to seek a retreat in the decayed part of a tree, of a fence rail, or even of a prostrate log moldering on the ground. I have found it placed in a short stump at the bottom of a ravine where the tracks of raccoons were as close together

as those of sheep in a fold. In all these situations our bird seeks a place for its nest, which is composed of more or fewer materials as the emergency may require, and I have observed that in nests nearest to the ground the greatest quantity of grass, fibrous roots, feathers, the hair of different quadrupeds, and the exuviae of snakes was accumulated. The nest is under the above circumstances at all times a loose mass. Sometimes when at a great height, very few materials are used, and in more than one instance I have found the eggs merely deposited on the decaying particles of the wood, at the bottom of a hole in the broken branch of a tree, sometimes of one that had been worked out by the gray squirrel."

In "Wilson's Ornithology," we find the following with regard to the nesting habits of this bird: "The great crested flycatcher arrives in Pennsylvania in May and builds his nest in a hollow tree deserted by the blue-bird or woodpecker. The material of which this is formed is scanty or rather novel. One of these nests now before me is formed of a little loose hay, feathers of the guinea fowl, hogs' bristles, pieces of cork, snake skins and dogs' hair. Snake skins with this bird appear to be an indispensable article, for I have never found one of his nests without this material forming a part of it. Whether he surrounds his nest with it by way of terrorism to prevent other birds or animals from entering, or whether it be that he finds its silky softness suitable for his young, is uncertain; the fact, however, is notorious."

So it seems that heretofore the great crested flycatcher has been content with any old tree or stump that afforded him a cavity into which he could gain access. But now the little bird-houses in the vineyard, scattered about on the posts, attract his attention much to the chagrin of the bluebirds and wrens. Apparently unconscious of this, the pair proceed with their house hunting much after the fashion of human bipeds.

The male stations himself on one of the little houses, and with his harsh voice calls his mate. She comes and inspects the house, but seems to have some objection, so they go the rounds, even looking into those already occupied by bluebirds, but they do not molest them.

A male bluebird is watching the pair from an adjacent grape post as they visit his home. The flycatcher is stationed on the

top of the house and screaming for his mate. She comes and merely looks in and finds the female on the nest and immediately flies away, but the male stays awhile and continues to call, evidently thinking that she did not half look at the house, but she does not return, and as he flies away, the bluebird who was watching him at a safe distance, now courageously flies after him and then returns to his mate who meets him at the door, and they chatter over the matter in their low, sweet way, he apparently telling her how he has driven the hateful fellow away!

The flycatchers next visit a little house fastened to the railing of an upper piazza, but this too is occupied by a family of bluebirds, and they leave them unmolested. At last madam flycatcher chooses the finest establishment on the premises—a three-storied octagon house surmounted with a cupola and spire, with a weather vane and ball attached to the spire. The house is fastened to the top of the stable, and was originally intended for the martins, but a pair of bluebirds were the first to occupy it, and they have held it for several years past, allowing no other bird to get possession; but they do not try to drive the flycatchers, who finally select the cupola which they find empty.

They are beyond my reach but they do not try to prevent my seeing the material which the female carries to the house. On the contrary they seem wholly indifferent to my presence, much more so than our familiar bluebird.

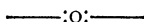
The male always precedes his mate and heralds her approach with a clamorous noise. He stations himself on the ball or weather vane above the cupola, and seems to be giving directions to his partner in a very loud voice, while she works with a perverse stick that she cannot get through the door.

She selects a stick longer than the door, and stupidly holds it about midway and tries to force it through. If it is too stout to bend or break, she works long and laboriously, while her partner looks on and screams. At last, discouraged with the hopeless endeavor, she comes to the ground and selects another. She proceeds in this way for several hours. Finally she learns to put the stick end first through the door, and now the work progresses rapidly.

They are gone longer than usual, so long that I begin to fear they have given up their elegant site, but in a few hours I again hear the harsh voice of the male, and on looking up, see the

female following her mate with a streaming banner, which proves to be the indispensable snake skin.

Whether this bird, like its little congener, the wood-pewee, has at last concluded that its nest will be more safe near the habitations of man, remains to be seen.



THE REASONING FACULTY OF ANIMALS.

BY JOSEPH F. JAMES.

MUCH as has been written on the subject of instinct and reason in animals, the question as to whether they possess reason is nearly as far from being answered as ever, and people continue to write and argue with the same pertinacity as of yore. Some writers have maintained that all the actions of animals lower than man, are performed by a something designated as instinct, and that this was a faculty given by Divine power to animals, to take the place of reason possessed only by mankind. Others have said that both animals and men have reasoning powers, but the former in such a limited degree as to be hardly noticeable. Still others contended that animals were actuated to a very great extent in their actions by reasoning faculties, and that entirely too much stress has been placed upon the power of instinct;¹ while a last party have said that neither man nor beast is possessed of reason, but that both perform all their actions automatically, and being under the influence of unchangeable law, do what they do because they cannot do otherwise.²

In the olden time, before we knew as much about the animal world as we do now, the unerring faculty of instinct was expatiated upon times without number. All animals were set down as without reasoning powers, and when one did perform an action out of accordance with its usual life, it was looked upon as a most remarkable phenomenon, and as instinct working in an abnormal direction. Besides, this instinct was thought to be bestowed by the Deity, directly upon the animal. In later days

¹The latest book taking this ground is "Mind in the Lower Animals," by W. Lauder Lindsay, 2 vols, 1880.

²Descartes' idea of animated machines. It has for its strongest supporter Professor Huxley. See article "Are Animals Automata?" by T. H. Huxley in *Popular Science Monthly*, v, 724.